

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUITO 06135 272307Z

12

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 /033 W

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R 272242Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1329

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 6135

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, KN, KS, US

SUBJECT: REACTIONS TO PANMUNJOM INCIDENT

REF: (A) STATE 211862, (B) QUITO 5620

1. DURING ENTIRE PERIOD OF PANMUNJOM INCIDENT AND AFTER-MATH, ATTENTION OF ECUADOREAN PUBLIC AND GOE HAS BEEN FOCUSED ON NATIONAL TRAGEDY OF A DOMESTIC AIRLINER MISSING SINCE AUGUST 15 WITH 57 PERSONS ABOARD. AS A RESULT, THE PANMUNJOM INCIDENT HAS RECEIVED LESS PRESS AND PUBLIC ATTENTION THAN MIGHT OTHERWISE HAVE BEEN THE CASE. PRESS REPORTING HAS BEEN DRAWN FROM WESTERN, MAINLY U.S., WIRE SERVICES AND HAS UNIFORMLY REPORTED THE INCIDENT IN A LIGHT FAVORABLE TO THE US. INCIDENT MADE PAGE 1 HEADLINES ONLY TWO DAYS: IMMEDIATELY AFTER OCCURRENCE AND ON AUGUST 22 WHEN MOST PAPERS FOCUSED ON THE POSSIBILITY OF A RENEWAL OF HOSTILITIES. THERE HAS BEEN NO EDITORIAL COMMENT AND ONLY ONE EDITORIAL CARTOON, WHICH STRESSED THE DANGER OF WAR.

2. EMBOFF WAS INTERVIEWED ON A PRESTIGIOUS NEWS SHOW IN QUITO ON AUGUST 24 ABOUT THE INCIDENT. INTERVIEW TOOK THREE MINUTES AND QUESTIONS WERE SOMEWHAT PROVOCATIVE. INTERVIEWER, A CONTROVERSIAL TV JOURNALIST, ASKED WHETHER US OFFICERS HAD PROVOKED THE ATTACK, TO WHICH EMBOFF REPLIED THAT THERE WAS NO SUCH PROVOCATION. ANOTHER QUESTION WAS WHETHER US SHOULD LEAVE PLACES
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PAGE 02 QUITO 06135 272307Z

WHERE IT IS NOT WANTED. EMBOFF REPLIED THAT THE US

PRESENCE SEEMED TO BE WANTED BY THE SOUTH KOREANS AND REFERRED TO US ROLE IN UN COMMAND AND BILATERAL AGREEMENT WITH SOUTH KOREA. LOCAL REACTION TO EMBOFF APPEARANCE HAS BEEN UNIFORMLY POSITIVE. IT IS DOUBTFUL, HOWEVER, WHETHER THE INTERVIEW WILL SWAY MANY ECUADOREANS ONE WAY OR THE OTHER ON KOREA QUESTION.

3. OTHER COMMENTS AND REACTIONS OBTAINED BY MISSION PERSONNEL HAVE INVARIABLY BEEN SYMPATHETIC TO US AND CRITICAL OF NORTH KOREAN ACTION. THERE HAS BEEN, FOR INSTANCE, NO CRITICISM OF LEVEL OF US REACTION TO THE ORIGINAL INCIDENT.

4. COMMENT: IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THIS INCIDENT WILL HAVE ANY GREAT IMPACT ON POSITION OF ECUADOR RE KOREA QUESTION IN THE UN. GOE IN PAST HAS DEALT VERY CAREFULLY WITH THIS SUBJECT, ATTEMPTING TO MAINTAIN ITS THIRD WORLD CREDENTIALS WHILE NOT OVERLY ANTAGONIZING US. LAST YEAR THE GOE ULTIMATELY SUPPORTED THE FRIENDLY RESOLUTION AND ABSTAINED ON THE HOSTILE RESOLUTION. REF B REPORTED EMBOFF CONVERSATION AUGUST 5 WITH FONOFF OFFICIAL IN CHARGE OF DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS WHO INDICATED INFORMALLY THAT ECUADOR WOULD PROBABLY "SUPPORT THE US POSITION AS IT DID LAST YEAR." DCM IN CONVERSATION WITH THAT SAME OFFICIAL ON AUGUST 24 EXPRESSED HOPE THAT GOE WOULD VOTE AGAINST HOSTILE RESOLUTION AS WELL AS FOR FRIENDLY RESOLUTION IF SUCH RESOLUTIONS COME TO THE FLOOR FOR A VOTE IN THE COMING UNGA. GOE OFFICIAL SAID HE WAS WORKING HARD TO GET THE FOREIGN MINISTRY TO ACCEPT THIS POSITION, BUT ASKED THAT THE USG NOT APPLY PUBLICLY PRESSURES TO CONVINCE GOE TO VOTE WITH IT ON SUCH ISSUES, SINCE IT PLAYS INTO THE HANDS OF THOSE ECUADOREANS ADVOCATING A STRONGER THIRD WORLD ROLE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MURDER, DMZ, BORDER INCIDENTS, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 27 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ShawDG
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976QUITO06135
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760328-0848
From: QUITO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760812/aaaaajxg.tel
Line Count: 95
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 STATE 211862, 76 QUITO 5620
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ShawDG
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 20 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <20 JUL 2004 by SmithRJ>; APPROVED <02 NOV 2004 by ShawDG>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: REACTIONS TO PANMUNJOM INCIDENT
TAGS: PFOR, KN, KS, US, EC
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006